The cultural code of modernity and the problem of nature: a critique of the naturalistic notion of progress

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THE CULTURAL CODE OF MODERNITY AND THE PROBLEM OF NATURE
A CRITIQUE OF THE NATURALISTIC NOTION OF PROGRESS[1]

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[1] Thanks are due to Barbara Young who went through several versions of this paper trying to clarify the argument and to improve as much as it has been possible the "Germanic English" characteristic of the first versions of it.

I. THE PROBLEM OF NATURE

Our growing awareness of the worldwide ecological crisis has damaged, perhaps completely, our conviction in the rationality of modern society. Rationalization itself has come to sound increasingly negative as we disentangle it from the idea of progress. More and more, we are experiencing a deep ambivalence toward the model of rationalization that has underlies, accompanies and has directed European-type modernization processes.

The challenge of the "problem of nature" contributes to a new understanding of the culture of modern society. It could even contribute to a fundamental revision of the *code* of modern culture. For it challenges the basic element of this code: the boundary between nature and culture. In acknowledging the problem of nature we are putting the symbolic foundations of modern culture at stake. Nature, traditionally seen as sharply separated from the world of culture, can no longer be considered as external and opposed to society. The relation between nature and culture has to be redefined and the cultural code of modern society reorganized.[2] The problem of nature also sensitizes us to an ambiguity in the *rationality* ascribed to modern culture. It forces us to fully reevaluate the normative assumptions of modernity, even to redefine the progress that is supposedly its fruit. Thus the ecological crisis provides an opening for ideas (and movements as carriers of these ideas) that define rationality differently from the dominating one.

Modern culture has so far been dominated by a conception of rationality that takes nature as a means to other ends. This rationality in fact excludes any moral considerations from the realm of nature. By defining nature as the locus of the emotional, of the nonrational, or even the irrational, the subjugation of nature to ends defined by culture becomes the model of rationality. This is what disenchantment is about. Increasingly, there are reactions against this form of rationality. Radical new discourses on nature, both everyday and intellectual ones, plead for the repeal of "disenchantment", and call instead for "reenchantment". Reenchantment is played off against disenchantment, the core idea of rationalization.

[2] I have treated this topic at length in a book titled "The Socialization of Nature. Studies in the Social Evolution of Practical Reason" (Eder 1988). There I treat the "problem of nature" from a theoretical as well as historical and cultural anthropological point of view. Nature is seen a the basic element of the cultural code of a society. The notion of a cultural code can be traced back principally to Claude Lévi- Strauss. For its sociological application within a Parsonian framework see Münch (1986).

These allegedly "nonrational" or "irrational" discourses and ideas, thematizing "the other side of modernity"[3], rely on a conception of *practical reason* that does not exclude moral considerations from the realm of nature. It is a practical reason based on a sympathetic identification with nature, on a quasi- social relation with nature. It is a practical reason compatible with a reenchanted nature. It is a practical reason that might even lead to an alternative form of rationality in modern society. Such a *communicative* conception of practical reason is opposed to the *utilitarian* conception of reason dominating the modern relationship with nature and shaping its modern culture.

This modern duality in practical reason can be traced back to its Greek and Semitic origins. These cultural traditions represent two cultural codes, the one based on the myth of a bloody origin of humanity, the other based on the myth of a paradisiac origin. They represent a "bloody" culture and an "unbloody" culture that define the cultural universe we still live in. The "bloody" side could explain some of the cruelties that were part of the rationalization process shaping modern society: cruelties against the human body, against animals, against nature as well as against culture.[4] This could explain the ambivalence of modern society toward rationalization, an ambivalence so deep seated that even Weber struggled with it, though inconclusively.[5]

Expanding thus the notion of the cultural traditions that shape the European experience of modernization to include the unbloody as well as the dominant bloody one, we deliberately take into account counterprocesses that have inadequately been described as "antimodernization" or "traditionalistic regressions". The new definition of the cultural code of modern society that ultimately emerges is not based on the notion of a culture beyond modernity (e.g. postmodernity), but rests on a broader notion of the culture of modern societies that dominate social evolution today.

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[3] This is the way, Schäfer (1986) puts it. He points to ideas, scientific knowledge and social movements counter to the dominant modernity. Following this lead we do not plead for something beyond modernity, but for a notion of modernity that incorporates the protest against it as part of modernity. Eisenstadt (1986) argues similarly when criticizing modernization theory.

[4] Here I refer to historical experiences that are intimately related to the rise of modern society, above all to witch- hunting in 17th and 18th centuries and fascism in 20th century. It is difficult to exculpate modern society from these events without criticizing the very social and cultural conditions that have led to or made possible such events.

[5] Here I refer to Weber's idea of the "battle of gods" that goes along with the formal rationalization of modern society. This quotation comes from Weber's famous speech on "Science as a Vocation" (Weber 1922, pp. 582-613). For a discussion see Schluchter (1988). See also below note 11.

II. DISENTANGLING RATIONALITY FROM PROGRESS

1. The Marxian heritage

Let us start with a critical approach to describe the rationality constitutive for the progress of modern society: the Marxian approach. In Marx the close relationship between progress and the rationality built into the development of the forces of production is beyond question. That development, freed from the bonds of feudal relations of production, is foreseen as the mechanism that will eventually break apart the irrationality of the social relations of production in capitalism and generate rational ones.[6] In the meantime, our experience of the development of the forces of production has indeed been that they are no longer blocked but actually fostered by the social relations of production. But the emancipatory effect is contrary to what Marx thought it would be.[7] The development of the forces of production has contributed to legitimate the relations of production, whether capitalist or socialist. And it has reduced the relation to nature in modern society to a mere instrumental one. It has led to "progress" in the subjugation of nature, which is tantamount to "regress" in the social relations with nature. This double effect points to the limits of one of the most important images modern society has produced of itself: of the image of being a progressive society.

[6] This "mechanism" can be seen as neutral with respect to its outcome. But such an interpretation of Marx is - as I see it - inadequate. There is in Marx a conception of man's relation to nature that offers ultimately a "productivist" notion of rationality. See for this claim Eder (1988), pp. 30ff. See also Habermas' critique of Marx in Habermas (1979). Habermas' critique is insufficient because he substitutes the social relations of men among themselves for the basic relation of man to nature. This solution to the Marxian problem of nature separates two spheres of human action and thus overlooks the internal connections between both spheres of action. The problem of nature forces us to give up the idea that nature is subject to instrumental and culture to communicative action.

[7] This self-negating character of rationalization has been treated by Horkheimer and Adorno as the "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (Horkheimer/Adorno 1947). The domination of nature is seen as extending over society as a whole. The dialectic ends in the universal domination of instrumental reason. Reconciliation with nature ("Versöhnung mit der Natur") as mediated by esthetic forms is the only chance to escape instrumental reason. This idea found a politically radical expression in Marcuse (1963, 1967). For a systematic discussion of and a different solution to the "Dialectic of Enlightenment" see Habermas (1981), pp. 489ff.

It is in Marx' idea of how the forces of production develop that we find the key to the *ambivalence of rationalization* characteristic for modern society. This can be attributed to the questionable logic that a society free from domination can be based upon a nature dominated and defeated by this society. To the extent that the rationalization of society is seen as being dependent upon developing forces (!) of production, the idea of a rational society is bound to a *utilitarian* type of practical reason. In order to go beyond this restricted notion of practical reason we must start to redefine the relationship of society with nature beyond the idea of "forces" of production. Looking at it as a symbolically mediated relationship will enable us to elaborate the idea of a social relation with nature as a model for other types of practical reason constitutive for the social relations, be they of production, exchange or consumption.[8]

Going beyond the perspective inherited from Marx we can reconstruct the theoretical idea of forces of production as a cultural category, as a specifically defined cultural form of appropriating nature. Then we can extend our notion of a social relation to nature and see the basic forms of social life from production to consumption as being determined by specific cultural definitions of that relation to nature.

The way societies in history manifest this varies. But modern societies surpass most other societies in applying the crudest form of a social relation to nature: that of an *instrumental use of nature*. Nature is nothing but an object. Modern society belittles as primitive the opposite attitude, that of treating nature as a person, and claims "progress" for this version of relating to nature. Increasingly, however, it appears to be bound to a process of self-destruction which is in turn destructive to the notion of progress built into the cultural code of modern societies.

Correcting this perspective has become the more urgent the more the development of modern society runs into the ecological crisis that threatens its further material reproduction. Progress must be disentangled from the idea of subjugating nature. Instead, the idea of progress must develop in a way that relinquishes that subjugation. We have to go beyond Marx.

[8] Such a relationship with nature has normally been associated with some kind of romanticism or even irrationality and therefore been excluded from scientific discourse. This might explain why the problem of nature does not exist in the social sciences. It has been left - as something exotic - to cultural anthroplogy and recently to the history of mentalities. For an interesting cultural anthropological treatment see Douglas (1966, 1975). For a historical account see Thomas (1983).

2. The Weberian radicalization of Marx

The usual proposition is to look at Max Weber. Yet Weber's work is only a radicalization of Marx, generalizing it by assessing rationalization from the point of view of the universalization of formal rationality.[9] Weber's concept of rationalization refers above all to calculability. His analyses of bureaucracy and law, of economic life and religious ideas, are impressive pieces of historical work and interpretation. His scrutiny even includes those phenomena opposed to the incarnations of rationality in formal organization and formal law, in modern economy and modern culture. But they are treated as "aberrations" from the ideal path of formal rationalization seen as constitutive for modern society. He subsumes these aberrations under the heading of material rationality[10] which is then nothing but an illegitimate child of formal rationality.

Weber's religious studies do not hinder him from seeing modern culture as the apotheosis of formal rationality.[11] He is convinced that the logic of formal rationalization is inevitable in modern society. He is not unaware of its costs. His metaphor of the "iron cage" describing the outcome of formal rationalization and his metaphor of the "new polytheism" deriving from formal rationalization suggest that formal rationalization inevitably leads to irrationality. But these scarce hints are insufficient grounds for crediting Weber with exposing the ambivalence of modern culture.

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[9] For this notion of rationality in Weber see especially Schluchter (1981). The model from which Weber has taken the structure of formal rationality is modern positive law. Its rationality lies not in its ability to produce justice but in its ability to produce comparable and calculable results.

[10] Habermas (1981) claims that there is no concept of formal rationality that does not imply some minimal material assumptions. Therefore the distinction between formal and material rationality is only a matter of relativity. This point was already made by Marx who showed that the formal rationality of modern law presupposes assumptions about subjective rights (e.g. property rights) and the modern fundamental rights of freedom.

[11] Weber's central problem is to show how even religious traditions helped shape the form of rationality prevalent in modern European culture (Weber 1920). His theoretical strategy contributes to underestimating competing cultural traditions, and it explains the irritations Weber runs into when he examines the cultural developments of his times. For an interesting analysis of Weber's sociology of religion and its relation to the new "battle of gods" see Schluchter (1988). For an extension of this Weberian program see Eisenstadt (1986).

We really need to start fresh. We have to reconstruct anew the traditions modern culture is made of and determine their relative influence. This will not (and cannot) be done here. But we can point to the different traditions that merge within modern European culture and their consequences, both manifest and latent, for coexisting and sometimes competing strategies of conceptualizing nature. We can sketch the programmatic of a new look at the culture of modernity, a look forced upon us by the problem of nature.

III. A THEORETICAL REORIENTATION: TWO TYPES OF MODERNITY

1. Reconstructing the code of European culture

A. Two cultural traditions

The roots of the ambivalence of modern culture can be found in the Greek and Jewish history that, through the Christianization of Europe, constitutes our cultural heritage. A unique blend of two traditions whose internal contradictions are complementary, modern culture has developed the alternative options available within them according to the Greek model.

Ancient Greek society was characterized by a model of political domination legitimized by extensive bloody sacrificial rites. These sacrificial Delphic rites represent the real symbolic base of the society. The political system was held together primarily by this symbolic code and only secondarily by its democratic ideology (in fact an intellectual invention of later Greek history!).

Good evidence for the dominance of the bloody model underlying Greek culture comes from the cultural orientations of those social groups opposed to it. Most important were Pythagorean groups who defined themselves by their vegetarianism, a value orientation clearly opposed to the bloody rituals. Vegetarianism can be seen as a symbolic rejection of the dominant culture. Logically, persecuting these vegetarian groups became the way to reinstate the dominant culture.[12]

[12] This short analysis refers to recent research on Greek society that goes beyond the classic euphemisms. Classical Greece consisted not only of some philosophers but also of a political system that has had a decisive influence upon the history of political domination in Europe. It was by isolating the Greek philosophical traditions from their social and political context that the idea of the Greek miracle became possible. But this obscured the understanding of the effects of this type of thinking. We can do better when we try to understand the social and political context within which this thinking arose, to which it reacted and which it helped to rationalize. For the literature used see especially Detienne (1972, 1979a, 1979b) and Vernant (1971, 1979).

Jewish society on the other hand was characterized by a cultural code that succeeded in institutionalizing cultural restrictions upon its forms of political domination. This was the decisive difference between the Jews and their neighbors. The non-sacrifice of Isaac is one of the myths marking the historical point when the Jews began abstaining from human sacrifice even while their neighbors continued to practice it. Increasingly the Jews restricted the shedding of blood. This restriction was rationalized by the recourse to the ideal of a non-bloody paradise in society. Because in reality it was impossible to completely circumvent bloodshed, rules of ritual purity became enormously important. These rules put strong limits upon the practice of bloody sacrifice and other practices concerned with animals and other forms of nature. The rules became more and more complicated as social life increased in complexity. The unique canon of dietary prohibitions and rules characteristic for Jewish society thus represents a cultural tradition that tries to limit the opportunity of using an Other (be it human, be it animal, be it nature as such) as a mere object. It favors instead a culture that puts symbolic limits upon such uses.[13]

Jewish obsession with ritual purity explains why its political society never really developed the social dynamism characteristic of Greek or Roman society. Yet, the code had tremendous cultural validity. Intervention from outside could not change it. The Jews were never mobilized by political elites the way neighboring societies were. The Romans knew why they were trying to force the Jews to eat pork. It would have been the best way to destroy the symbolic basis of the culture. The early Christians also belong within this cultural code. The Romans saw them to be a radical Jewish sect. The cultural basis of their persecution was - like the persecution of the Jews later in European culture - rooted in the cultural divide that distinguished them from and even opposed them to the bloody tradition of Greco-Roman culture.[14]

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[13] The ritualistic character of Jewish culture has often been emphasized. But the meaning of this ritualism has normally been missed, to be "explained" by religion in what amounts to a tautological explanation. But religion does not "explain" the meaning; it arranges and rearranges the content that gives meaning to rituals. In this sense religion is a (mytho-)logical system giving coherence to myths that rationalize ritual action. In Jewish society the main myth is that of the fall from paradise and the resultant longing for a world without blood. Judging the real world from the angle of the paradisiac ideal structured norms and values that guide social action (cf. Eder 1988, pp. 200ff.). It led to the preoccupation with blood and gave rise to rules of purity that allow for addressing the problem of blood. The "purity" of the unbloody state of nature then was extended into rules for the most elementary daily activities, especially eating. For an analysis of the ritual rules of eating from this point of view, especially the eating taboos, see Eder (1988), pp. 127ff.

[14] There were attempts in ancient Israel to challenge the ritual foundation of political domination by challenging the religious authorities upholding the code. Attempts by some political leaders to bring about polytheistic "regressions" (allowing for a return to the bloody sacrifice) and to adapt Jewish political society to the model characteristic of their neighbours generally failed. For more details see Eder (1988), pp. 200ff.

Thus the cultural code of Europe has a complex heritage. On the one hand we have the Greeks, a society that mobilized its social, economic and political dynamic by putting rather loosely structured controls upon the use of power. On the other hand we have the Jews, a society that integrated its economic, political and social dynamic into a cultural world that put rigid limits upon the use of power. The Greek model became the dominant model shaping the development of European society. The Jewish model contradicting it has always been circumscribed and ghettoized or been persecuted.[15]

The analysis of this double tradition allows us to broaden our conception of the cultural code underlying European culture. Both the dominant and the latent traditions have contributed to the process of modernization. Christianity, as the symbolic system mediating between and blending these two traditions, has not only reproduced but even intensified this strange constellation of two codes in one culture. The cyclical outbreaks of protest and rebellion, of "heterodoxy", in Christian culture can be seen as attempts to reverse the relationship between the two cultural codes. The movements associated with for example St. Francis and John Hus are carriers of a cultural orientation opposed to that institutionalized in Christian culture.[16]

This dynamic of European culture has had costly effects. Its history is the history of suppressing the alternative tradition within modern culture. The persecutions of heretics, of witches, of the Jews are - added to the destructiveness of the religious wars - proof of it. The alternative tradition has therefore remained - due to bloody force - part of a "collective unconsciousness".[17] Now, however, the dominant

[15] The social fate of Jewish culture within European culture is revealing. The aggressions against and persecutions of the Jews in European society through to modern times can be explained from the structural location of this cultural tradition within European culture: representing the model opposed to that dominant in this culture.

[16] The literature on messianic movements in medieval culture is abundant. An interesting case is that of the early heretics, especially the Cathars, who thought salvation consisted in escape from flesh. Mistrust of flesh is the most basic characteristic of this heretic tradition. The procreation of flesh and the consumption of its products (meat, milk, eggs) were bad, part of the kingdom of evil (Moore 1975). For later heretics continuing this tradition see Leff (1967). For a general macro-sociological account of the role of such movements see Eisenstadt (1982). In order to reconstruct such symbolic systems we have to go behind the intellectual and theological disputes. These disputes were - beyond their manifest content - carriers of a latent content, representing and rationalizing the two opposed and antagonistic cultural traditions analyzed above.

[17] They have entered into and been fostered in the course of European history as conscious movements of protest against modernity and modernization. The history of cultural movements outside the main stream of political and economic development has only recently become the topic of

cultural tradition has come increasingly under attack as incapable of grasping the problems it produces, above all the problem of nature. This process forces modern society to confront the other cultural tradition that up to now has remained outside the discourse about modernity and modernization. The "collective unconsciousness" has begun to be publicly discussed and collectively shared. The effects of this process of discovering and uncovering a latent tradition upon the cultural evolution of modernity cannot be exaggerated. They will certainly change modern culture.

B. Two conceptions of nature in modern culture

The problems modern society has run into in its relation with nature have ended the latency of its "other" tradition, the one deriving from Jewish culture. This second tradition proposes solutions to the "problem of nature" incompatible with those of the first one. The problem of nature has made us aware of the basic and elementary opposition of Greek and Jew.

Looking into the two traditions we can find two conceptions of nature rationalizing two contradictory ways of relating to it. The Greek tradition utilized nature without restrictions. Nature (like a sacrificial animal) was not only an object of politics. It was treated as a means to other, namely human ends. The logic of this coding, permitting the shedding of blood without any cultural restriction, underlies the dominant relationship with nature in modern society. The Jewish tradition on the other hand restricted the use of bloody rituals by binding the sacrificial acts to the model of a paradisiac state of nature. The ritual rules of purity were attempts to reinstate at least partially the Biblical paradise where men and nature were subject to a higher law and lived together in peace. This coding implied a relationship with nature whose logic is defined by a harmonious or peaceful relation with nature. Nature is defined in such a way that limits its use as such by human beings.[18] Thus we can describe the basic code of European culture as one pulled between a bloody model, derived from the code of Greek city state, and an unbloody countermodel, derived from the Jewish code of ritual purity. These two roots still operate on a basic structural level, each defining a different relation of man to his outer world, to nature. This duality shows us again the deep ambivalence built into our culture.

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scientific historical research. Concerning the research on protest and movements and its implication for the theory of modernization see Eisenstadt (1981, 1986).

[18] This takes up the argument made above with respect to these traditions. In the following the consequences of the opposition of nature and culture for the conception of nature will be emphasized. See Soler (1979) and, building upon Soler, Eder (1988).

The key to modern rationality nevertheless remains the Greek code. The category "poiein" (the work of the artisan) that Greek culture differentiated from and favored over the category of "prattein" (the work of the peasant) indicates the direction of the Greek cultural outlook: The proper relation with nature was not praxis, but poiesis.[19] Nature was material to be shaped by man. The normative implication is far-reaching: by defining nature as a material we have been able to operate on it without limits, to even engage in a bloody relationship. The history of European civilization can be seen as an attempt to channel this bloody interaction by rationalizing and civilizing its "manners".[20] But it has not changed the code of this culture that favors the unlimited use of nature, non-living and living alike.

With this cultural code in mind as a background, it becomes easier to understand some practices and movements in European history based on a different relation to nature and that today manifest on a much broader scale within the ecological mood and movements. We can decipher a cultural meaning in romantic love for animals, in modern vegetarian movements, and in animal rights movements.[21] As part of a counterculture movement, provoked and suppressed at the same time by the dominant culture, these have been the social carriers of the latent alternative tradition of relating to nature. Today they are becoming the key to a new, spreading type of rationality in modern society.

Until the 20th century this counterculture existed only in discrete social niches, either persecuted or scorned. But as the problem of nature has become more insistent this old counterculture tradition, which in fact offers an alternative to the most pressing problem of modern societies, has assumed new life. This tradition lies at the

[19] This difference taken from Greek philosophical thinking points to an ambivalence inherent in Greek culture. The "poietic" tradition was favored via its elementary cultural codings. But at the same time the cognitive means criticizing it was developed by elaborating the concept of "praxis". The latter concept has influenced different strands of modern social thought, from the early Karl Marx to Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and (in a different way) Pierre Bourdieu. For a discussion of this difference see Eder (1988), pp. 306ff.

[20] One example is the development of the knife and fork for eating meat! See Elias (1971). This rationalization can be seen as an attempt to generalize the dominant code of modern culture on the level of everyday life.

[21] These phenomena have gained increasing attention in the last few years. For some German contributions see e.g. Schimank (1983), Sprondel (1986), Weiβ (1986), Hepp (1987) and Eder (1988), pp. 225ff., 256ff. For important earlier works see Honigsheim (1956) and Gusfield (1966). I would like to call the carriers of such discourses *cultural movements* thus distinguishing them from *social movements* constitutive for the rationalism (and rationalization) of modern culture. Here I adopt Touraine's idea of social movements as the "producers" of modern society (Touraine 1977, 1981). At the same time I try to extend it to include the cultural movements up to now at the margin of the historical process in such a theory of the "self-production of society".

base of what we call the ecological movement.[22] This new movement is a cultural as well as a social movement. As a *social* movement it continues the conception of "material" rationality of the old social movements, the working class movements and the bourgeois movements. As a *cultural* movement it goes beyond this rationality and pleads for a rationality that puts into question not only the social relations of production, domination and consumption, but also the symbolic forms serving as the medium of these social relations. It pleads not for social relations that correspond to some criteria of *justice*, but for social relations that correspond to some criteria of *purity* (Eder 1989). Thus changing the symbols that allow for symbolically mediated communication, the ecological movement is transforming the cultural underpinnings of social life in modern society. It is here the possibilities for a type of *communicative* practical reason have to be sought.

2. Two cultures in modern culture

A. Contradictory discourses in modern culture

As we have seen, modern culture contains two competing conceptions of nature. Let us now focus on a theoretical description of the cultural code specific to modern society. To describe this double code three pairs of conceptual oppositions will be used: (1) rationality and romanticism, (2) evolution and equlibirium, and (3) utilitarian and communicative reason.

A first opposition contrasts ways of perceiving and experiencing nature. *Rationality* comprises orientations toward nature that value efficiency in some form or other. *Romanticism* rejects these orientations, basing its understanding of nature upon norms taken not from logical insight, but from intuitive knowledge.[23] The two

[22] There is no consensus concerning the usage of the term "ecological movement". For the most common use of the term see in Germany Brandt (1982) and Brandt et al (1983). I restrict my use of the term to those groups that are concerned about the destruction of the natural environment (e.g. pollution) by political and economic institutions and organizations but not by the people that consume nature. In this sense the ecological movement is primarily a "social" movement. The modern natural food movement (from vegetarian to healthy food groups) is not a social movement but a "cultural" movement. Therefore I would like to distinguish between the ecological movement and the alternative nutrition movement pointing to the difference in the way the social movement and the cultural movement thematize the relationship of men with nature. See Eder (1988), pp. 256ff. An example for such a cultural movement within the ecological movement is the "deep ecology movement. For a discussion of its ambiguities see Luke (1988).

[23] Romanticism thus appears as a tradition that continues - mediated and fostered by the "Greek" tradition of the Enlightenment - a relationship with nature that is to be found in the Jewish heritage. This interpretation allows us to see Romanticism as being more than a mere reaction to

orientations are tied to two differentiated spheres of value: the cognitive and the esthetic. The first has been embodied in modern science, the second in modern art. The rationalist- scientific conception reduces nature to what can be experienced by the senses and deduced from sensual experience through theoretical reasoning. The romanticist-esthetic conception extends the range of experiences of nature beyond the scope of science. Its experiences are therefore found in esthetic forms rather than in the form of scientific discourse.

A second opposition thematizes the time dimension underlying modern relationships of nature with culture.[24] This relationship can be seen as one of evolution or as one of an equilibrium, as one based on a linear time conception or as one based on a cyclical time conception. The idea of *evolution* has played an important ideological function in the self-description of modern society. Referring to a "scientific" conceptualization of social development, it has simultaneously fulfilled ideological functions while legitimating the superiority and expansion of modern Western culture. From the evolutionary perspective, nature is an object upon which selective pressures exerted by human society act to shape and change its forms. The net result of such pressures is adaptive advances toward a greater control of nature. This process is seen as unavoidable.

The idea of an *equilibrium* between society and nature can be traced back to the image of a natural state. Its most simple version is a return to nature, widespread in romantic thinking. But there are other variations, based on as many equilibria as there have been paths of history. These equilibria are not identical with a natural

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the Enlightenment (e.g. Timm 1978). Rather, it can be seen as an attempt to create a more comprehensive Enlightenment. This is possible when we see Romanticism as a movement resulting from a different strand of European culture trying to adapt to the exigencies of modern life. For a classic sociological discussion of Romanticism as a cultural movement see Honigsheim (1956). For a more recent treatment see Weiß (1986). Campbell (1987) shows that romanticism contains an ethic that has decisively shaped the modern "spirit of consumerism". The emphasis on consumerism is another way of correcting the productivist conception of modern culture inherited from Marx. And a sociological analysis of the romantic tradition is one means to do so. The consequence of such an approach is a closer look at the symbolic constructions underlying our forms of consuming nature - and here the Jewish tradition offers a way to criticize the mere instrumentalist approach to our ethic of consumption.

[24] The opposition between nature and culture can be solved by "temporalization" in two ways. First there is the possibility of advancing from nature to culture. This can be called the "progressistic optimism" of modern culture. Then there is the possibility of returning from culture to nature. This has been a general topos of cultural critique in modern culture (and Rousseau is only the most famous representative of this type of thinking). Such temporalizations again point to the two competing traditions modern culture carries. For an interesting discussion of different conceptions of time within European culture see Wendorff (1975).

state but represent different culturally defined states of the relation of society to nature. The equilibrium that allows for the reproduction of society in nature depends upon the cultural form society gives to its natural environment. This idea of an equilibrium presupposes an interactive relationship between society and nature, thus expanding the one- way relationship characteristic for the idea of an evolution based on the increasing mastery of nature by society. Uniting both aspects it arrives at a conception where nature and society evolve together, a process mediated by culture.

A third opposition derives from differing a priori assumptions about practical reason. *Utilitarian reason* is strategic, calculating the effects of the use of nature upon nature. It dominates the economic ideology of of modern society. *Communicative reason* on the other hand treats nature as a symbolic good and restricts the uses of nature to what can be justified on moral grounds. This type of relation with nature is encouraged be the new counterculture. As it acts upon nature, practical reason can vary between two extremes. One extreme applies a utilitarian ethic and the other an ethic of upholding universal a priori principles. Thus when speaking of *practical reason* we need to distinguish between two interpretations.

The utilitarian interpretation idealizes the "rational man" freed from social and cultural restraints and mobilizing his self- interests. This concept has become the point of reference for the "formal" rationality of this society. The communicative interpretation idealizes an interactive mankind composed of equals free to air their differences. This form of practical reason has partially succeeded in the political realm (where is has been incorporated into human rights advocacy or in the moral idealism of cosmopolitanism) and, as Habermas for example claims, in private bourgeois life, in the modern familiy. Both are seen as embodiments of communicative practical reason, whereas the economic and the administrative system are seen as bound to the dominant strategic or utilitarian type.[25] Both models of rationality can be identified in modern society. They become manifest when the two cultural models of relating to nature come into direct confrontation.

Logically speaking, the ecological movement can stimulate both models. Ecological thinking can be considered the most advanced version of the dominant utilitarian

[25] Here I refer to Sahlins' work on "Culture and Practical Reason" (1976) which uses "practical reason" in the sense it has been used in modern society, i.e. in the utilitarian sense. Pointing this out Sahlins contributes to the de-illusioning of modern practical rationality. But he underrates the other meaning of practical rationality, one that is contained in modern society within the limits of the private and public realms. As long as decisions about the direction of social change are made outside these limits Sahlins's point is well taken. The meaning carried by the claim of practical rationality is a means of criticizing its more restricted version. The perception of this problem will be stimulated - and here I follow Sahlins without hesitation - by the definition and redefinition of our relationship to nature, by the way we consume nature.

mind, a radicalization of modern economic ideology. But ecological thinking can also stimulate the counterculture tradition. This potential for ambivalence within the ecological movement is represented today e.g. in the split between the "realistic ecologists" and the "deep ecologists".

As ecological problems have increased and attitudes that were once latent gained respect, a dual relation to nature within the cultural code of modernity has come to light. The price has been an unequivocal notion of modernity. We are presently left with the phenomenon of two cultures in one culture, of two definitions of modernity within modernity. The theoretical puzzles thus produced still await resolution.

B. Two cultural models of modernity

It is the conflicting conceptions of nature that give us the key to the most basic differences between the "two modern cultures". They are basic in the sense that they thematize the competing rationalities underlying these two cultures. The cultural rationalities at issue can be conceptualized as "culture as profit" and as "culture as communication" (Sahlins 1976; Leach 1976). Both rationalities can be seen as specific versions of *practical reason*. The one is the utilitarian version based upon the rationality of efficiency and maximization. The other is the communicative version based upon the rationality of equality and discursive argumentation. In terms of discourse theory the difference can be described as one between a monologue and a dialogue form of practical reason.[26]

Thus we can now identify two forms of *practical reason* that determine the rationality of modern culture. Both utilitarian and communicative reason have been operative in the history of modern culture in Europe. The bourgeois culture of the 18th and 19th century mixed these two rationalities and produced the illusion of one. The cultural changes brought about by the labor movement then separated them and

[26] This interpretation of competing concepts of rationality and reason is taken from the theory of communicative action. (Habermas 1981). In a reconstruction of political modernization in 19th century German society I have tried to develop systematically the idea of an egalitarian and discursive relationship as the organizing principle of modern civil society (Eder 1985). I differ from Habermas when defining the competing notions of rationality. Habermas opposes functionalist reason to communicative reason, an opposition that detracts our attention from those rationalities that determine actual social conflicts. The problem centers on how we try to organize and orient collective action in a given situation (or given systems of social action). The problem is to construct an adequate theory of practice. And here I propose the theoretical alternative to be between utilitarian and coommunicative rationality (Eder 1988). Sahlins (1976) and Leach (1976) seem to me to argue in the same way. These alternatives are themselves a manifestation of the double tradition characterizing the cultural heritage of modern society.

left them without any systematic relationship. Now, the ecological crisis of present-day advanced industrial societies has made us aware that the cultures are dependent one upon another. This gives us a chance to escape both the illusionary 18th century fusion and the realistic 19th century separation of these two rationalities. And it forces us to find a new way of relating the two.

The theoretical task before us then is to end the separation between the two cultures as it manifests itself in a dual social theory: one half concerned with the realm of strategic and utilitarian action and the other concerned with the realm of communicative action. We can no longer, as Habermas (1981) has proposed, separate two different social worlds by merely analytically distinguishing between system and life-world. Separating the two cedes the realm of nature to the systemic sphere dominated by the culture-as-profit orientation. Moreover, we have to acknowledge that morality pervades the realm of nature as much as technology pervades the realm of men. This being so we can no longer separate two notions of progress in modern culture, the one defined as technological progress, the other as moral progress. They are indissolubly tied together. There is a problem, however, in how duplications of concepts key to the culture of modernity can be circumvented.

The practical task before us is to criticize the use modern society has made of the notion of progress to describe its development. Having lost the faith in the progress we have made so far has rendered this self-description into illusion. We have to revise the notion of progress. It is the only way modern social science discourse can maintain its use in the self- description of modern society.

IV. REVISIONS OF THE NOTION OF PROGRESS

1. Bourgeois culture and progress

The bourgeois culture of 18th and 19th century tried to fuse the utilitarian and communicative traditions of practical reason under the heading of progress. Technological progress and moral progress would be but two sides of one coin. Progress, realized through science and technology, would be a means of freeing society from the limitations of nature and thus contribute to the moral progress of mankind. This optimistic expectation of the culture of Enlightenment was based on the belief that everything that challenged traditional forms of belief, above all science and technology, contributed to the moral progress of mankind.

Then, as the social thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries became aware of the negative social consequences of modernization they began to differentiate the conception of progress. Some challenged the inevitability of moral progress so self-evident to the Enlightenment. Marx was one of the most important of these critics. Moral progress was still not at hand; it was something society still needed to struggle for. This could be done in two ways: either by imposing morality "from above" or by claiming a morally better world "from below".[27] Marx himself was ambivalent with respect to these options. But whatever the solution proposed, the progress ascribed to the development of the forces of production remained unquestioned. The mastery of nature still could serve as a model of social progress. Only a few challenged this idea. These critics were labeled "romantic". The justice of the utilitarian relationship with nature was simply too self- evident to modern society. No critique of the technological model of progress had any real chance under these historical circumstances.

This situation has however changed. With the expansion of the ecological discourse the progressive character of our relation to nature is no longer self-evident and the rationality of that relation is now subject to challenge. The notion of progress, under increasing pressure since the coming of the ecological crisis, has become the central ideological and practical concern of advanced industrial societies. The new problem posed by the ecological crisis is not simply the problem of survival; it is the problem of a "reasonable" relation to nature. Now that even the notion of technological progress, that aspect of modernization that once seemed to be its most clear-cut

[27] This constitutes an interesting field of historico- sociological analysis. It involves undertaking historical comparisons of such strategies, and analyzing the social conditions and consequences of such strategies. I have tried this approach with the case of 19th century German society where in the second half of 19th century the imposition of moral progress from above became the dominant model of bringing about "moral progress". See Eder (1985).

advantage, causes cultural irritation, we can no longer assume an empirical basis for the idea of progress. Since claiming moral evolution causes similar irritations, progress seems to be a fiction. It would be easy to give up progress as a meaningful theoretical category and to relinquish it as a mere ideological category.

But the idea of progress is more than an ideological force in modern society. It is a category that contains "counterfactual" postulates and is also used in this way. Progress is still considered to be something that has to be produced. We simply have to understand and analyze better. We need to understand its practical use beyond that classic situation where "natural progress" was a culturally shared idea. What we as sociologists can contribute to the analysis of the use of the notion of progress is to push the disturbing disillusion about "natural progress" into active "de-illusioning". We can
- de-illusion the idea of a self-propelling progress in modern culture
- de-illusion a unilinear progress
- de-illusion European-type modernization as a model.

This de-illusioning process has already been accomplished with respect to the idea of moral progress. We have research criticizing modernization theory as either ethnocentric or as inadequate to grasp pathological paths of modern development. But only when we criticize technological progress, this last bastion of self-evident progress, will the idea of progress begin to be freed from naturalistic fallacies. Then there will be nothing but a concept ready to be filled with meaning. The theoretical problem before us then is to relocate the idea of progress within the present social and cultural struggles and to define the limits of possible choices in such struggles.

2. The range of possible choices

We are left with the thesis that after the loss of a substantive idea of progress the idea of progress is now open to cultural struggles to define and redefine its contents. As a corollary, the cultural traditions underlying modern European culture are in fact being used by competing and even antagonistic collective actors to give a new content to this idea. The analysis of such collective actors, of cultural movements, then becomes the key to explaining the fate of the notion of progress so central to the self-description of modern societies.

Thus we have come to view progress as the "definitional" result of "symbolic struggles" (Bourdieu 1984) in modern society. It turns out that the notion of progress is a means by which social actors try to influence social change. It is not inherent in modernization. It has no unequivocal validity. The notion of progress is a way of describing and validating an emerging cultural model. It refers to a field of social conflict between actors seeking to define the direction of social change. Within

social science discourse, such a theoretical idea can be found in the concept of a "self-production of society" (Touraine 1977).[28]

But the range of possible notions of progress used to legitimize a cultural model of social development is not without limits. Combining two fields of human action (nature and culture) and two cultural orientations of human action (communicative action and utilitarian action) gives us four possibilities for the practical use of the notion of progress:

-The first one is to restrict the notion of progress to the field of strategic/instrumental action. The idea of dominating nature then defines the rationality of cultural practices. This is the model that permeates modern societies.

-The second one is to restrict the notion of progress to the field of moral action. Moral evolution is the privileged field of the idea of progress. This restriction excludes the relation of man to nature from the agenda of rational practice. This notion has become the model of the new humanist critique of the perversions encountered in modern societies.

-The third one is to reduce the notion of progress in both dimensions to its function in the reproduction of social systems. Actors are the environment of social systems that behave like strategic actors. Such an idea can be found in Luhmann's system-theoretical approach. The reification of social practice here is worth a hard look because the collective experiences of the dominance of systems in modern societies foster such a conclusion.

-The fourth one is to generalize moral action across nature and culture. This implies a form of practical reason in our relation to nature that allows us to re-couple technological and moral progress. This would involve changing some basic cultural conceptions of nature in order to be able to treat it according to some standards of a morally grounded practical rationality.

The first two conceptualizations of progress are the classical ones claiming a "natural progress". They no longer work. The choice between technological progress in nature and moral progress in society is no longer operative. We can no longer equate technological and moral progress under the heading of formal rationality. But we can give both processes either a "strategic" or a "communicative" direction. The choice then can ultimately be reduced to the alternative between progress in the

[28] This discussion is the necessary follow-up to the type of cultural analysis I present. For after analyzing culture the interesting question becomes culture in action. We have treated progress as an expression of a dominating cultural tradition and now we arrive at a sociological treatment of progress as being the result of symbolic struggles the carriers of which are competing social and cultural movements. The theoretical efforts and disputes from Luhmann to Habermas and from Bourdieu to Touraine can be given a new objective meaning from this perspective.

dimension of "culture-as-profit" or in the dimension of "culture- as-communication", the third and fourth possibility above.

The third possibility is probably an escapist strategy. It simply denies the constructive aspects of collective communicative action and discourses. The idea of progress appears as nothing but an element in the "autopoiesis" of society (Luhmann 1984) and is thus an overtly ideological notion. The fourth possibility is the most promising as a starting point for disentangling the concept of rationality from the historical model of European- style progress based on the overpowering of nature. A way to scrutinize the historical possibility of such a concept is to analyze how present social struggles and discourses mobilize competing cultural traditions (the Greek and the Jewish) to produce competing definitions of progress. We do not need to give up the idea of progress. We simply need better theoretical tools for a sociological analysis of its use in modern society. The tools are there - we need only adapt and apply them.[29]

V. CONCLUSION

The idea of progress has in recent years increasingly been put into question. The key experience contributing to disengaging the idea of progress from the idea of rationality has been the ecological crisis. This crisis has made modern culture look like it fosters a way of organizing social life that is self- destructive. The crisis has nourished cultural movements counter to modernization. There are groups and discourses, everyday ones and intellectual ones, that plead for reenchantment as opposed to disenchantment. Modern culture has started to react to this experience by putting into question its key concepts: rationalization and rationality. Modernization based on rationality appears to be only one of many alternative ways of organizing modern social life. It appears to be nothing but the social form forced upon the majority of societies in the world by a dominant European culture and its American and Russian derivatives. Modernity is a cultural force that has imposed upon us a form of social evolution that cannot control its own consequences.

New, alternative ideas and movements are increasingly being directed against this type of modern rationality. These counterprocesses are not adequately described as antimodern or traditionalistic regressions. Instead, they represent another type of rationality and rationalization within the legacy of modern culture. The increasing

[29] To combine such different strands of theorizing within European sociology seems to me a promising effort. Europe, being that part of the world where the problem of nature was invented and radicalized, offers a context of social thought that can objectively confront and possibly treat the pressing new problems of advanced industrial societies.

concern with nature that we experience today is symptomatic of a fundamental cultural cleavage *within* the culture that underlies, accompanies and regulates the development of highly complex societies in European-type modernization processes.

This cultural cleavage is traceable to the Semitic and Greek origins of modern culture. Two conflicting traditions, one of bloody sacrifice and one of unbloody (vegetarian!) paradise, still define the cultural universe within which we live. Expanding the notion of cultural traditions constitutive for the European experience of modernization and conceptualizing it as the manifestation of competing codes of modern culture, we are able to identify not one but two types of relationships with nature in modern society. Thus we arrive at two types of rationality encountered in modern culture: utilitarian rationality and communicative rationality, and at two types of culture within modern culture: culture as profit and culture as communication.

Ultimately, we have the outline of a new theoretical notion of progress. It is one that puts into question any social theory premised on its own progressiveness in terms of the European version of progress. The current ecological crisis has destroyed the last bastion of the belief in natural progress, the mastery of nature. Social theory should continue the task of de- illusioning this self-ascription, of disengaging European-style progress from the notion of modernity.

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